

T.O. Fuller's Park History

The park was bought by the Tennessee state government from a local man named Dover Barrett and was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in 1937. The CCC was formed on April 5, 1933 during a critical time in the United State's history. It was a time when thousands of women and men were unemployed during the Great Depression. One response by F. D. Roosevelt was to create jobs that would offer environmental and social services to the country. The CCC worked diligently on forest and park conservation as-well- as on halting soil erosion on farms. The men who served on the CCC received only \$30 a month as well as some educational benefits. As little as this sounds, it was cherished during a time of descending poverty. From 1937 to 1942 these men ate, slept, and worked in these Tennessee forests with the bare minimum to live on. Fuller was one of the first four parks built by the CCC in Tennessee with a total of 76 other camps built all over the state. The original CCC camp for African-Americans is what is now T.O. Fuller's campground area, which is under heavy renovation and will be reopened in the spring of 2000. The CCC built picnic tables and a maintenance building along with planting honeysuckle and black locust.

The CCC was also responsible for finding Chickasaw Native American relics. This led to the creation of the Chucalissa Village in 1962 on a Native mound complete with recreated temples and homes, a museum, and theater. Chucalissa is on T.O. Fuller's park, but is managed by the University of Memphis. It is believed that even the old explorer, Hernando De Soto once stood on the same mound that Chucalissa stands on back in 1540. For more information about special events like Pow-wows and Native stick ball games call 901-785-3160.

When visiting T.O. Fuller State Park, you will be amazed about how much wildlife has been left untouched here. Surrounded by mom and pop stores, neighborhoods, and roadways, T.O. Fuller is 1,138 acres of mostly forest. Prior to 1950, most of Tennessee looked like T.O. Fuller State Park- filled with wilderness and many wetland areas (partially due to the annual flooding of the Mississippi River). The rich Memphis soil is directly related to this annual flooding as the wind blown silt or loess that was carried by the melted water of the ancient glaciers thousands of years ago. Hence the bluffs in this area are called loessel bluffs as some loess deposits can reach up to 100ft in the Missouri and Mississippian Valley. Fuller's forested system is also referred to as the Beech Hickory ecosystem due to the concentrated amounts of these trees that are in the area.

The pond off of Riverport Road in Fuller park was created by the Corps of Engineers in the 1950's when they decided to create a levee to stop the Mississippi River from flooding. Prior to 1950, the water from the Mississippi River would flood from Crowley's Ridge in Arkansas to the bluff that surrounds the North end of the park surrounding McKellar Lake. Portions of the old Native

American village, Chucalissa, and the golf course would of also been flooded annually. This area was considered the old river bed. Everything would have been destroyed except for any strong hardwoods or animals that were able to climb these trees or fly away. The fortunate aspect of this flooding was the enrichment of the soil. The decaying plant and animal material re-fertilized the flooded area causing much vegetation and animal re-population to occur once the flood season was over. The rich soil is exactly why the flooding was ceased by the Corps of Engineers as farmers began to cultivate the area for agriculture. A levee was built up around McKellar Lake and then later a railraod track. In order to create the levee, dirt had to be collected to build the land up surrounding the lake. The dirt was taken from what is now T.O. Fuller's wetland area - a dredged ditch - directly east of Mitchell Road and South of Riverport Road. The Horn Lake Cutoff used to run South to North into McKellar lake, but since the levee was built the water had nowhere to go. This water swelled and began to flow to the South and East where it helped to create many of the wetland areas in the park area. The Horn Lake Cutoff water now flows North to South towards the pumping station. The Horn Lake Cutoff did not create the pond east of Mitchell Road, a family of beavers did. On the western side of the pond, you can see the beaver dam.

As you walk along the Southern portion of the pond, at the end of the dirt road, you can see the beaver's lodge. Elsewhere along the pond you can also find smaller lodges. The beavers have also gone further down Horn Lake Cutoff and created more dams. They will keep building dams and creating pond areas as they prosper. At dusk it is common to see the beavers snacking on bark and patching up their dam. While hiking on our wetland trail in the day use area, you may see red-ear sliders, red-tailed hawks, northern cricket frogs, blue herons, king snakes, and more. You also may see tracks of bobcat, deer, coyote, turkey, and raccoons. Some plant life that can be found on our trail are the Tulip Poplar, Paw-paws, Slippery Elm, Oak, Beech, Eastern Cottonwood, May Apples, Willow, Horsetail, Water Primrose, and more. Outside of T.O. Fuller, West on Riverport Road, there are many industries, as well as the Earth Complex- Memphis's waste treatment plant. There are an abundance of wetland areas there as well, also created because of the levee. They are open to visitors and have a free pumpkin picking day in their patch during October for school groups. For more information on the Earth Complex call 901-789-0510. [Information obtained from the Wolf River Conservancy, Peter Alfonso (Earth Complex), Ranger Frank Alston, Ranger Ryan Forbess, and Don Thomas (U of M).]